

How does shakespeare create tension in act 2 scene 2 of macbeth

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Macbeth, a Shakespearean tragedy follows the journey of the protagonist Macbeth as he plots to assassinate King Duncan, after hearing a prophecy from the three witches. Shakespeare's most powerful and emotionally intense play follows the journey of betrayal, guilt and murder during the Jacobean era. Despite, written almost 400 year ago, Macbeth is still equally popular amongst the contemporary audience as to the Shakespearean audience. Tension is a tremendously crucial element in Macbeth, helping to intensify the tragedy and suspense created among the audience in Act II scene ii, building up to its ending.

Shakespeare constructs dramatic tension throughout the play by utilizing a variety of literary techniques, stagecraft, character's behaviour and relationship. Lady Macbeth's is an extremely essential character throughout the play: her character is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband, Macbeth. She manages to push Macbeth into committing the blasphemous murder with the dominance and overpowering behaviour. At the beginning of Act II scene ii, Lady Macbeth is overwhelmed at the signs of victory as 'the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman, which gives the stern'st good-night...

He is about it. ' During the Jacobean era the hoot of an owl was considered auspicious as people were superstitious that it symbolised a messenger of death; however the 'shriek' of the 'owl' implies a virtue for Lady Macbeth meaning impending death for someone. She considers the 'shriek'd' as a good omen, nature's own 'fatal bellman' (the announcer of death). Therefore,

Lady Macbeth believes that her husband must be 'about it', committing the dreadful murder.

Shakespeare's use of Lady Macbeth's behaviour to foreshadow helps build tension and curiosity as to whether Macbeth is actually murdered or still alive. The Shakespearean audience would be left puzzled because King's were treated as god's representative, beyond humans and supernatural powers; they would be unable to sympathise with Lady Macbeth as she lead Macbeth into this atrocious sin. In contrast the modern audience would disapprove the illogical beliefs of Shakespearean audience as owls aren't treated as nature's own 'fatal bellman' in the society today.

However, Lady Macbeth's behaviour soon changes after the return of Macbeth, scolding him for his guilty attitude. Lady Macbeth is presented as a tremendously domineering and controlling character, helping to arise tension among the audience. During the end of Act II scene ii, Lady Macbeth states 'Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood. ' Lady Macbeth is berating him because he is not solid or concrete in his determination to go through with what he wants and needs to do.

She ridicules him by saying 'Infirm of purpose! ', denoting he's a coward. Shakespeare's use of exclamation mark places greater emphasis on the phrase, helping to convey that Macbeth is weak and worthless. Moreover, the use of imperative verb 'give' implies Lady Macbeth's supremacy over Macbeth, almost portraying the she's the husband. Lady Macbeth's

behaviour is deplorable considering the hierarchy of Elizabethan women, who are considered subservient to men and raised to believe that they were inferior to men.

The modern audience wouldn't be surprised by this behaviour, as the society today believes women and men to be equivalent. Shakespeare's clever use of Lady Macbeth's assertive character helps to build tension among the audience, throughout the play. Macbeth is a crucial character used by Shakespeare to create dramatic tension, through the terrible effects that ambition and guilt can have on a man who lacks strength of character. Unlike Lady Macbeth, Macbeth is plagued by worry and almost aborts the crime in Act II scene ii.

Towards the ending of the scene, Shakespeare uses blood imagery and irony to emphasise Macbeth's guilt: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? ... The multitudinous seas incarnadine/ Making the green one red.' Macbeth's guilt is overbearing and the 'multitudinous' of his crime against the Divine Rights of King, awakens him into a powerful sense of guilt, leaving a tormenting effect on his mind. Moreover, ironically 'all great Neptune's ocean' cannot cleanse of the burden of guilt, that there is enough blood on his hands to stain the entire ocean 'red'.

Additionally, the use of the phrase 'multitudinous' further emphasising the enormity of his crime, which no amount of water from the 'Neptune's ocean' could clean his guilty conscience, helping to build tension. Furthermore, the vibrant images of 'blood' and 'water' symbolises Macbeth's inability to erase

the memory of Duncan's murder and the impossibility of ridding their conscience of the deceitful deed they committed. The Shakespearean audience would be unable to sympathise with Macbeth's guilt as the Jacobean people strongly believed in the Divine Right of King, whereby insulting the King would be an insult to god.

However the modern audience maybe sympathetic towards Macbeth with repentance, as today's audience has open-minded opinions, with room for forgiveness. In reality sleep helps rest and refreshes the mind, helping to ease a person allowing them to function normally, however Shakespeare intentionally uses sleep imagery to further emphasise Macbeth's guilt.

During the conversation between the two protagonists Macbeth recites "Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house: ... Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more. ' The repetition of 'sleep' clearly illustrates the deep mental annoyance on Macbeth caused by the unscrupulous deed, which even 'sleep' cannot provide relief to. His frantic and almost delirious rave highlights his conscience bothering him, helping to create a tension atmosphere among the audience. Alternatively, the disturbance of 'sleep' could also portray the unpeaceful atmosphere created, which will permanently awake them from peace. This would leave a drastic situation of tension among both the audience.

Furthermore Shakespeare also uses religious language to portray Macbeth's regretful and distressed behaviour, depicting his guilt: "One cried 'god bless us! and 'amen' the other" and "I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' Stuck in my throat. " The repetition of 'amen' is extremely significant as it

represents Macbeth's guilt and embarrassment toward his murder, with extreme shame to speak to God. The fact that 'amen' is 'stuck' in his 'throat' clearly reveals his indescribable remorse from the depth of his heart and his paranoia at being unable to get the words out of his mouth.

Guilt has encircled Macbeth and feels the spiritual consequence of his actions, still with Duncan's blood on his hands helping to build tension. The audience views for Macbeth at this stage would drastically vary between the modern and Shakespearean audience. The Shakespearean audience who find it extremely difficult to sympathise with Macbeth as religion (Christianity) was given great importance during the Jacobean era. However many may feel sympathetic towards Macbeth because he fell in evil greed of the throne after the witches' prophecy.

Shakespeare's stagecraft is also extremely vital in Macbeth, helping to create an ominous and tense atmosphere in Act II scene ii through sounds, make-up and the use of props. Sounds are tremendously important in Macbeth, helping to construct tension: "I heard the owl scream and the cricket's cry." Shakespeare heightens the feeling of the eeriness of night by introducing the remarkable sound of the owl's voice, and most effectively when some deed of villainy is on foot, as 'owl screams' popularly signs to portend coming disaster.

Similarly, the 'cry' of the 'cricket' adds to the mood and tragedy of the murder. Moreover, 'blood' is also mentioned numerous times throughout the play, providing an omnipresent tone which helps build tension.

Shakespeare's use of the word 'blood' is particularly significant, helping to unfold dramatic events of the play. Furthermore daggers are also essential in Macbeth, making the audience reminisce about the gruesome murder, helping to interest and tense the audience throughout the play.

Macbeth, Shakespeare's shortest tragedy but one of the most influential and emotionally intense in history follows the journey of the betrayal, guilt, murder leading to its gruesome aftermath. Shakespeare has created an amazing work of literature, providing the allusion of our current times through the use of stagecraft, literary devices and character behaviour. Macbeth not only entertains us but with Shakespeare's forward-thinking for his time, provides voice to the marginalised in society.